

Using Role Play in the ESL Classroom

Paul Howl, Asia University

INTRODUCTION

The Japanese ESL classroom can be a challenging environment for successful speaking. Each student can be painfully shy when asked to answer a question. It is even more difficult when the student is asked to speak in front of the class. Even worse, how can you encourage a Japanese student to perform in front of the class? This essay suggests activities which can lead to successful opportunities for the student to do creative role-play in the classroom. It also provides reasons why creativity in role-play can encourage and inspire your students and create a more positive and fun classroom environment.

THE PROBLEM

The problem lies with culture and teaching limitations in the classroom. Japanese students are taught at an early age not to be outspoken. Each student must listen to the teacher instructions and complete the work. An opinion is not encouraged in the Japanese classroom. In addition, students are afraid to make a mistake in front of their peers because their pride is at stake. Therefore, they are reluctant to speak up unless they are confident that the answer is correct. When the student arrives to the college level these attitudes do not change. This becomes a true challenge for the non-Japanese teacher. The teacher asks questions to the students and expects an answer with an opinion. However, he or she receives a limited, soft-spoken answer.

A teacher may try different ways to encourage student opinion. He or she may put them into groups and give them an interesting topic. He or she may provide many visuals to encourage them to speak. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. The following solutions will hopefully encourage students to express themselves in a creative and positive fashion.

THE SOLUTION

The solution lies in types of activities and material which makes students feel comfortable. When a student feels comfortable, he or she is willing to take more chances and learn at the same time. Students feel comfortable expressing their opinion in a very small group setting. I found that students become creative, expressive and even adventurous when they work as group. These activities are simple and allow the students to express

themselves without so much fear and anxiety. Eventually, the student will have the desire to express their opinion, role play a situation, learn something and have fun at the same time.

Activity 1

Students write a list of 5 hobbies that they truly enjoy. Students must write reasons for enjoying each hobby. Then they share with a partner. This is the beginning of trusting each other and expressing their opinions.

Activity 2

Students are asked to write about a favorite actor or actress. Provide a list of adjectives that will help them express the personality of the character. Then they share with a partner.

Activity 3

Each student must take out a piece of paper and write down four very simple activities, for example: drink a glass of water. Next, put the class into groups of no more than four. Each student must stand and act out each activity for his or her own group. The group members must then provide an answer. This is the first attempt at creating character in role play. Once again, the students do not feel to pressured or anxious. They can express themselves without fear.

Activity 4

Students choose an important topic from a given list. Topics are fairly simple. They go to the library to do research. They must find important information relating to the topic. These include: dates, events, places, people etc... Students must present a two minute speech on this topic. This activity helps students stand in front of a class and communicate. It may feel uncomfortable at first, but the students will feel a sense of accomplishment when they are finished.

Activity 5

This is when the fun begins. Students are given the opportunity to be creative and express character and personality. Split the class in half. Provide partners for each student. Give a simple situation on paper for each group. They must read and understand the situation, characters and their relationship to each other. The students must write a simple scene related to the situation. If it is a lower level class, provide example scenes. This will allow the lower level students to feel more confident about writing a scene. Students will practice the scene and present it in front of the class.

PERSONAL EXAMPLE

I have used these activities in a variety of my CELE classes. My most challenging classes were my lower level Freshman English classes. The activities worked very well. I cannot stress enough the idea of starting with simple speaking activities. We did just that. My students started to become more involved and excited. They wanted to speak more and take chances. When they did their speeches, they were nervous. But they were motivated and spoke clearly. The role-play scenes went very well. I helped them and guided them by giving them direction and ideas for physical movement, facial expression, vocal expression and character. They took my direction and created wonderful performances. I was very proud of them!

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this essay is to enhance English language understanding through the use role-play. The students are given guidelines, vocabulary and activities to help them develop role-play skills. I have purposely provided simple activities which become more challenging. The student can transition from one activity to another without feeling anxious and insecure. It is especially difficult for the Japanese student to express what they are feeling in the classroom. I want to provide a fun and creative classroom where the students can take risks without feeling afraid. Role-play can be an activity that provides expression for the students and helps them learn English at the same time.

References

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